
N E I G H B O R H O O D
P R O F I L E



Introduction

Throughout its history, North Cambridge has been known as a stable neighborhood with a wide range of ethnic and household income groups. Historically, the neighborhood has been home to generations of French Canadians, Irish and Italian families. While this is still true today, other immigrants from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Central America have moved to the neighborhood in recent years. During the past decade, growing numbers of higher income professionals have also been attracted to North Cambridge. While in the past, the majority of residents fell into low or moderate income groups, many of these newcomers are causing the median household income in North Cambridge to rise substantially.

The degree and rate of population change occurring in North Cambridge has been noted by many residents with concern. Long time residents, often the elderly or first time homebuyers, are increasingly unable to remain in North Cambridge, while only those new residents with substantial incomes can afford to move in. Residents fear this trend will alter the fabric of North Cambridge and threaten to destroy the very qualities which make the neighborhood an attractive place to live.

This chapter provides an overview of the major demographic changes (population, income, education and occupation) which have taken place in North Cambridge from 1970 to the present. Two sources of information were used:

(1) The United States Census Bureau data from 1970 and 1980. (When available, 1960 information is included.)

(2) The 1988 North Cambridge Demographic Survey conducted by Bell Associates. This was a telephone survey of 416 randomly selected North Cambridge households. Because this is a survey of a representative sample of the population (unlike the U.S. Census which mails a questionnaire to every household), results have an accuracy rate of plus or minus five percent.

Due to methodological differences between the U.S. Census and the Bell Associates survey, as well as changes in the way in which the U.S. Census collected data between 1970 and 1980, comparisons of several demographic characteristics cannot be made.

Population

(1) The population of North Cambridge as well as for the City as a whole has declined steadily since 1960. Between 1960 and 1980, North Cambridge lost 29 percent of its population, while the City's population declined by 11.5 percent. The gap between North Cambridge and the City narrowed slightly between 1970 and 1980: North Cambridge lost nine percent of its population and the City, five percent.

North Cambridge Population

1960	1970	1980
15,544	12,097	10,990

(2) Between 1970 and 1980, North Cambridge lost nine percent of its population. The largest decline occurred among the age groups of 0-19 years (a 32 percent decrease) and 35 - 65 years (a 17 percent decrease). The City's five percent population loss also occurred in similar age groups, but at a proportionately lower rate: 0 - 19 years had a 20 percent decrease and 35 - 45 years, a 10 percent decrease.

(3) In contrast, the percentage of North Cambridge residents increased in two other age groups: a 17 percent increase in people aged 20 - 34 years, and an eight percent increase in people aged 65 and older. The City experienced a ten percent increase in the age group 20 - 34 years, but the percent of people aged 65 and older decreased by seven percent.

(4) The table on the following page highlights the population changes in North Cambridge from 1970 to 1988. The trends show a continued increase

in the number of people in the 20 - 34 age group, equalling 38 percent of North Cambridge in 1988, and in the 35 - 54 age group, totalling 24 percent of the neighborhood in 1988. In sum, 62 percent, or almost two-thirds, of the 1988 North Cambridge population is between the ages of 20 and 54.

North Cambridge Residents by Age Groups			
	1970	1980	1988
0 - 4 years	8%	6%	6%
5 - 19 years	24%	18%	14%
20 - 34 years	26%	34%	38%
35 - 54 years	19%	17%	24%
55-64 years	9%	9%	6%
65+ years	14%	16%	12%
Total	100%	100%	100%

(5) In 1980, 55 percent of all households in North Cambridge were families. In the City, 46 percent of all households were families. A family is defined as two or more related persons; a household is defined as one or more related or unrelated persons.

(6) According to the 1988 demographic survey, the percentage of families in North Cambridge has remained stable since 1980. The following table shows the 1988 breakdown of household composition in North Cambridge:

single person household	25%
couple with children	23%
couple without children	23%
live with roommates	17%
single parent household	9%
other	3%

(7) Between 1970 and 1980, both household and family size declined in North Cambridge. Household size decreased from an average of 2.8 persons per household in 1970 to 2.3 persons per household in 1980, compared to city-wide figures of 2.4 and 2.1, respectively. Family size declined

during the same period from 3.4 persons per family to 3.1, while city-wide family size decreased from 3.2 to 3.0 persons per household.

(8) The 1988 demographic survey shows that the greatest percentage of people in North Cambridge currently live in two person households:

1 person households	25%
2 person households	38%
3 person households	17%
4 person households	10%
5 person households	7%
6 person households	3%
Total	100%

(9) The number of female-headed families in North Cambridge increased by 43 percent between 1970 and 1980. In 1970, 18 percent of all families in North Cambridge, as well as city-wide, were female-headed. By 1980, 30 percent of all North Cambridge families had female heads of households, compared to 24 percent city-wide.

(10) Between 1970 and 1980, the number of female-headed families with children under 18 in North Cambridge increased by 61 percent. In the City, the number of female-headed families with children under 18 increased by 51 percent during those years.

Ancestry, Race & Ethnicity

(1) In 1980, the largest group of people claiming single ancestry in North Cambridge were the Irish (15 %). Italians (5%), English (5%), and French (4%) were the next three largest ethnic groups in the neighborhood.

(2) In 1980, 12 percent of the City's population lived in North Cambridge. In comparison, 18 percent of the City's Irish population and 28 percent of the City's French population lived in North Cambridge.

(3) Between 1970 and 1980, the number of black people living in North Cambridge increased from six to 14 percent. In the City, the number also

increased, but by a smaller amount from seven to 11 percent. According to the 1988 demographic survey, the number of black people living in North Cambridge has dropped to approximately ten percent.

(4) The proportion of foreign-born residents in North Cambridge increased from ten percent in 1970 to 15 percent in 1980. According to the 1988 demographic survey, this number has increased further to 21 percent.

Income

(1) In both 1960 and 1970, the median household income in North Cambridge was considerably higher than the median household income city-wide. By 1980, however, the median household income in North Cambridge had dropped to 97 percent of the City's median household income.

Median Household Income

	1960	1970	1980
North Cambridge	\$5,240	\$7,988	\$13,857
Cambridge	\$3,828	\$5,114	\$14,211
NC as a percent of the City	137%	156%	97%

(2) Between 1960 and 1980, the median family income in North Cambridge remained relatively comparable to the median family income city-wide.

Median Family Income

	1960	1970	1980
North Cambridge	\$6,077	\$10,086	\$17,123
Cambridge	\$5,943	\$9,815	\$17,845
NC as a percent of the City	102%	103%	96%

(3) In 1980, North Cambridge had the fifth highest poverty rate of the 13 Cambridge neighborhoods.

- Between 1970 and 1980, the number of families living below the poverty level in North Cambridge increased from five percent in 1970 to 13 percent in 1980. The number of families living in poverty in the City also increased during this same time period, although from nine to 11 percent.
- The percent of elderly people living in poverty has decreased in both North Cambridge and the City as a whole between 1970 and 1980. In North Cambridge, the percentage declined from 19 to 12; in the City, it declined from 14 to ten percent.
- In 1970, 31 percent of all female-headed households with children under 18 in North Cambridge were living in poverty. In 1980, this number increased to 39 percent. In contrast, the city-wide percentage dropped from 43 in 1970 to 34 percent in 1980.

(4) In 1980, income distribution in North Cambridge was as follows: 37 percent of the households earned less than \$10,000; 34 percent earned between \$10,000 and \$20,000; 21 percent earned between \$20,000 and \$35,000; and eight percent earned more than \$35,000.

(5) Because of methodological differences, a direct comparison of income between the 1980 census and the 1988 survey is not possible. However, the 1988 demographic survey estimates the income breakdown as follows:

- 22 percent are low income (50% or less of the median income for the Greater Boston area, or less than \$20,550 for a family of four).
- 14 percent are moderate income (50% - 80% of the median income, or \$20,550 - \$29,900 for a family of four).
- 45 percent are middle income and upper income (more than 80% of the median in-

increased, but by a smaller amount from seven to 11 percent. According to the 1988 demographic survey, the number of black people living in North Cambridge has dropped to approximately ten percent.

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years is 53 percent. The following table shows the length of residency for 1988:

Less than 5 years	47%
5 - 10 years	17%
11 - 20 years	13%
21 years or more	23%
Total	100%

(3) When comparing newer residents (those who have moved into North Cambridge within the last five years) to longer term residents, the 1988 survey found that newer residents tend to have higher incomes and more education. In addition, newer residents are more likely to be employed in professional occupations. According to the 1988 demographic survey, newcomer college graduates outnumber longer term graduates by two to one: 70 percent versus 36 percent. In addition, 69 percent of newer residents earn high incomes (over 80 percent of median), while 43 percent of those living here five years or more are in the high income bracket.

Summary of Demographic Changes

North Cambridge is experiencing a population decline comparable to losses in Cambridge and the greater Boston area. This decline is felt most strongly in the young (0 - 19 years) and middle age (33 - 65 years) groups. In contrast, the proportion of young adults (20 - 34 years) has increased considerably, from 26 percent in 1970 to 38 percent in 1988.

Slightly more than half (55%) of the households in North Cambridge are families. The greatest percentage of residents (38%) live in two person households, although one-fourth of all households are occupied by persons living alone.

Ancestry data is not available in 1988; however, in 1980, the Irish were the largest group in North Cambridge claiming single ancestry. The next largest ethnic groups were the Italians, English and French. Currently, black people make up ten percent of the neighborhood, and foreign-born residents, 21 percent, more than double the 1970 level of ten percent.

In 1970, the median household income in North Cambridge was 156 percent greater than that of the City. In 1980, it had fallen to 81 percent of the City's median household income. In addition, North Cambridge had the fifth highest poverty rate of the 13 Cambridge neighborhoods.

While a direct comparison of income between 1980 and 1988 is not possible, the 1988 demographic survey estimates that 22 percent of residents are low income (earning 50 percent or less of the Boston area median income, or less than \$20,550 for a family of four). Forty-five percent of North Cambridge households are middle or upper income (earning more than 80 percent of the Boston area median income, or more than \$29,900 for a family of four.)

Of those residents earning low incomes, the proportion of minorities to whites is quite high: one third of all Asians and almost half of all black residents earn low incomes. In contrast, 18 percent of all white residents earn low incomes.

The educational level of North Cambridge residents is rising. In 1970, 58 percent of residents over 25 had earned a high school degree. In 1988, this level had risen to 92 percent. The proportion of residents with college degrees rose from 16 percent to 52 percent.

Residents in professional, technical and managerial occupations rose from 27 percent to 58 percent between 1970 and 1988. When clerical and sales workers are added to this category, white collar jobs account for 78 percent of all employment, up from 57 percent in 1970. Blue collar jobs declined from 27 to 15 percent during this time.

Nearly half of all residents (47%) have lived in North Cambridge for less than five years while 23 percent have been here 21 years or more. Between 1970 and 1980, many newcomers to North Cambridge were lower income, minority and single heads of households. In contrast, those moving into North Cambridge in the 1980's tend to have professional occupations, and higher incomes and educational levels.

Residents Views of Neighborhood Quality and Community Participation

As part of the 1988 demographic survey conducted by Bell Associates, North Cambridge residents were asked a series of questions regarding their views on a range of neighborhood issues. The questions focused on neighborhood concerns, the ways in which the neighborhood has changed and the level of community participation in the decisions which affect the neighborhood. The results of this survey are presented below. Responses to questions aimed at specific neighborhood issues such as housing, parks and open space, are included in later chapters.

Neighborhood Quality

(1) Most North Cambridge residents think that the overall quality of life in their neighborhood has not changed significantly over the last five years:

Quality of life has remained the same	53%
Quality of life has improved	27%
Quality of life has diminished	17%
Not sure/No response	3%

(2) Most North Cambridge residents think that the level of community spirit has remained the same over the last five years, but that it will improve during the next five:

Past 5 years:

Community spirit has stayed the same	44%
Community spirit has improved	29%
Community spirit has deteriorated	17%
Not sure/No response	10%

Next 5 years:

Community spirit will improve	39%
Community spirit will not change	33%
Community spirit will deteriorate	12%
Not sure/No response	16%

(3) When asked to identify the qualities they liked best about North Cambridge, the following

characteristics were cited most often: physical condition/appearance (23%), convenience/location (20%), public transportation (18%), and neighborly feeling (15%).

(4) When asked about neighborhood problems, most residents cited high housing costs, lack of parking, high rents, traffic congestion, environmental quality, and development pressures as major problems. Rundown homes were considered to be a minor problem, while inadequate public transportation, lack of elderly services, lack of recreational facilities, and rundown parks were considered not to be problems. Finally, residents were divided equally on the degree to which they considered the lack of open space, lack of youth services, and lack of day care to be neighborhood problems.

The table below highlights community perceptions of neighborhood problems in North Cambridge:

Community Perceptions of Neighborhood Problems

	Major Problem	Minor Problem	No Problem
High housing costs	67%	12%	11%
Lack of parking	56%	20%	21%
High rents	49%	21%	22%
Traffic congestion	45%	31%	24%
Environmental quality	36%	29%	28%
Development pressures	31%	19%	21%
Lack of open space	26%	32%	38%
Lack of recreation facilities	20%	30%	41%
Lack of youth services	17%	14%	17%
Lack of day care	17%	10%	17%
Rundown homes	16%	45%	36%
Lack of elderly services	11%	18%	29%
Rundown parks	16%	34%	44%
Inadequate public transportation	3%	17%	79%

Community Involvement

(1) The majority of North Cambridge residents (68%) said they do not know enough about development plans for their neighborhood. This was especially true of newer residents (less than one year in the neighborhood); 88 percent of whom would like to know more about development plans in the neighborhood.

(2) When asked how they would prefer to receive information about the City's plans for the neighborhood, most residents said they would like the information sent to their homes through the mail, newspaper articles, and the neighborhood newsletter. Roughly half of the residents preferred to hear about plans by word of mouth and at community meetings. The least popular method for obtaining information was through meetings at City Hall.

(3) Forty-one percent of North Cambridge residents have wanted to change something or address a problem in their neighborhood.

The higher a person's education, the more likely he or she is to want to make changes in the neighborhood:

Some high school	11%
High school degree	29%
Some college	39%
College degree	44%
Post college degree	62%

Couples with children and single parents are more likely to want to make changes in the neighborhood than are couples without children, roommates or single persons living alone:

Couples with children	50%
Single parents	60%
Couples without children	37%
Roommates	38%
Single persons living alone	34%

(4) Of those residents who have wanted to change something in the neighborhood, 51 percent took some action. This was done by contacting a government agency (43%), a neighborhood organization (22%), the North Cambridge Stabilization Committee (7%), or some other means (17%).

(5) Of the remaining 49 percent (residents who have wanted to change something in the neighborhood, but have not taken any action), 32 percent said their inaction was due to a lack of time, 15 percent said taking an action would not make a difference, 16 percent said the issue was not important enough, 11 percent had been frustrated by previous attempts, and the other 26 percent were not sure.

(6) Nearly one-half (42%) of North Cambridge residents have heard of the Stabilization Committee. Of these, 49 percent believe they have done a good or excellent job of representing residents' needs to the City, 21 percent said they had done a fair or poor job and 30 percent were not sure.

(7) Of those who have heard of the Stabilization Committee, five percent are active participants having attended at least four meetings per year over the last two years and 79 percent are not active having attended fewer than four meetings per year over the last two years.